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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DUSHANBE 001435

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ECON ENRG TI AF IR

SUBJECT: IRANIAN AND AFGHAN PRESIDENTS' VISIT TO DUSHANBE BRINGS NO SURPRISES, JUST PERSIAN BROTHERLY LOVE

REF: A) DUSHANBE 1420 B) STATE 19436

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Hoagland, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy, Dushanbe, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Iranian President Ahmadinejad's July 25-26 visit to Dushanbe confirmed the close linguistic and cultural ties between Tajikistan and Iran; the multiple agreements signed further strengthened the bonds forged during Tajik President Rahmonov's January visit to Tehran. When Afghan President Hamid Karzai joined the party July 26, the three leaders reaffirmed their common cultural ties and agreed to meet annually as a part of an Intergovernmental Coordination Council. Aside from paying enthusiastic lip service to the construction of a hydropower mega-project at Dhosti-jhum on the Afghan-Tajik border, the visit produced little more than autographed agreements that may or may not be implemented. Tajik counterparts, understanding the optics of welcoming an official Iranian delegation while nuclear issues and support for Hezbollah go unresolved, tried to downplay the political aspects of the meeting and highlighted the economic points. END SUMMARY.

IRAN

¶2. (SBU) Ahmadinejad arrived from Turkmenistan July 25 to an immediate meeting with President Rahmonov and top advisors. In addition to a joint declaration on the development of bilateral relations, Tajik television reported that during the bilateral meetings, the Tajiks and Iranians signed five agreements relating to cooperation in:

--Justice;
--Labor and social protection;

--Tourism 2006-2009;
--Establishment of free economic and trade zones;
--Preferred tariffs on imports and exports.

¶13. (C) Ahmadinejad also attended the inaugural ceremony for the Anzob tunnel, a \$40 million project financed by the Iranians linking northern and southern Tajikistan. (NOTE: Despite the ribbon cutting, the tunnel still requires several months more work before it is open to the public. The project is rumored to be rife with embezzlement and corruption on both the Tajik and Iranian sides. END NOTE.)

¶14. (U) Ahmadinejad made only brief remarks to the press the first day of the visit, saving his comments and vitriol for the press conference that followed the tri-lateral meeting. After a well-publicized telephone conversation with Russian President Putin during his sojourn in Dushanbe, Ahmadinejad told the press only that they discussed "international issues," including the situation in Lebanon.

¶15. (C) Ahmadinejad's arrival did not include the usual high-level diplomats reserved for a visiting head of state. The German, French and British Embassies sent lower-ranking diplomats to his airport reception in place of their Ambassadors, although Tajik protocol introduced all diplomats on the tarmac as "Ambassador."

¶16. (C) According to the British DCM and French Ambassador, a week prior to Ahmadinejad's visit, the German, French and British Embassies in Dushanbe received instructions to deliver a joint demarche to FM Nazarov concerning Iran's nuclear program. Nazarov acknowledged that Iran has a right to develop nuclear energy, but agreed that Iran should refrain from any military nuclear program and should cooperate with the appropriate

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international bodies. Nazarov promised to pass the European message to President Rahmonov, a commitment he apparently kept as evidenced by press accounts which noted that Rahmonov and exchanged views on Iran's nuclear program and Rahmonov urged Iran to cooperate fully with the IAEA.

¶17. (C) COMMENT: Interestingly, when the subject came up in Ambassador Hoagland's farewell call on Rahmonov (Ref A) prior to the EU demarche, the president indicated he did not intend to raise such a contentious issue and would keep the upcoming bilateral with strictly focused on cultural, commercial and assistance matters. The EU demarche, perhaps with some credit due to our own message on the P5+1 incentive package (Ref B) delivered just prior to Ahmadinejad's visit, appears to have nudged Rahmonov to overcome his instinct to avoid politicized issues during the visit. END COMMENT.

ENTER AFGHANISTAN

¶18. (C) Afghan President Hamid Karzai joined the duo July 26 to attend the first trilateral summit of the three countries. (NOTE: The summit was meant to take place in Tehran in January, but Karzai, after consultation with the United States, backed out, citing "domestic issues." END NOTE.) The three leaders signed several memoranda in Dushanbe on economic cooperation and combating drug trafficking and terrorism. They also signed a charter to establish the Intergovernmental Coordination Council.

Press quoted Rahmonov as saying the council would be set up within two months and hold its first meeting in Kabul. The council will meet once a year "to tackle existing problems."

¶19. (SBU) According to some press reporting, it appeared as if the three leaders spent all of July 26 together. In fact, there was very little Ahmadinejad and Karzai overlap. Karzai arrived in Dushanbe at 16:20 hours, and Ahmadinejad departed by mid- to late evening.

MEET THE PRESS

¶10. (C) Rahmonov, Karzai and Ahmadinejad addressed 136

journalists after their meeting to announce the new agreements and jointly call for fighting in the Middle East to stop immediately. One press article reported that Ahmadinejad responded to questions about Iran's support for Hezbollah, by stating, "The United States has spread this slander in order to conceal its shortcoming."

(NOTE: Foreign Minister Nazarov pulled aside the Ambassador July 26 while diplomats were waiting for Karzai's arrival. He emphasized that the Tajiks had stressed to Ahmadinejad that he should not say anything against the United States during his press conferences. Nazarov expressed relief Ahmadinejad had honored their request during his first (July 25) media opportunity, but Nazarov said he couldn't guarantee that Ahmadinejad still wouldn't respond to "provocations" by journalists, which he clearly did on July 26. According to a BBC eyewitness, Ahmadinejad honored the Tajik request but lingered at the press table after Rahmonov and Karzai had left. He then reportedly said, "Ok now I will tell you what I really think," and let loose on the United States. END NOTE.)

¶11. (U) During the July 26 press conference, the leaders also announced support for construction of Dhosti-jhum, a proposed 4000 MW hydropower project on the Pyanj River between Afghanistan and Tajikistan that the Tajiks continue to press with investors and donors.

¶12. (SBU) The leaders spoke in Farsi, which posed a difficulty for many international journalists used to covering Tajik events in Russian. The MFA refused to offer any Russian-language interpretation, telling journalists to hire their own since it was not the responsibility of the MFA. The MFA also refused admittance to a U.S. Embassy staff member who is also an

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accredited journalist.

¶13. (C) COMMENT: Despite the enormous protocol and press, the summit appears to have been little more than an opportunity to feel good about the Persian language world, without holding any of the three states to real commitments. The Tajiks are still waiting for delivery of some of the promises made during the bilateral meetings in January, particularly the construction of Sangtuda-II hydropower station. This time around, it appears as if expectations were lower.

¶14. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Tajikistan continues to join organizations and sign memoranda which keep it in good standing with its neighbors and allies. Tajikistan needs economic assistance, trade and investment too much to alienate Iran. Rahmonov's foreign policy door remains open to other countries and the Tajiks continue to balance all the competing interests. Rahmonov does not at all trust Tehran politically and ideologically, but he wants Iranian investment. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND